



FOOD SAFETY– DURING AND AFTER POWER OUTAGES

If my refrigerator stops working because of a power failure, what should I do with the food in the refrigerator?

In emergency situations when replacing food right away is difficult or impossible, the following foods can be kept in a cool place (unrefrigerated) for a few days:

- Hard and processed cheeses, butter, and margarine (unless rancid or moldy)
- Fresh uncut fruits and vegetables (as long as not slimy)
- Dried fruit
- Opened jars of jellies, jams, commercially prepared vinegar and oil dressings, catsup, mustard, pickles, barbeque sauce, relish, and mayonnaise (unless contaminated with meat, fish or poultry products)
- Fruit juices

Discard spoiled and moldy food and anything that doesn't look or smell right.

Discard the following perishable foods if held at temperatures above 45 degrees F for more than two (2) hours:

- Raw and cooked meat, poultry, fish & seafood, milk and milk products, including ice cream, yogurts and soft cheeses
- Cooked fruits or vegetables
- Cooked rice, potatoes, taro, pasta and pasta salads
- Custards and cheese pies
- Fresh eggs
- Meat topped pizzas and cold cuts
- Stews and soups
- Cream filled pastries
- Refrigerated dough

Food poisoning bacteria cannot be detected by sight, smell or taste and can make food unsafe to eat if held at room temperature for more than four (4) hours.

How long will food stay cold in the refrigerator after the power goes out?

Up to four (4) to six (6) hours if the door is kept closed. If a food thermometer is available, check the food temperature after power is restored. If the food is 45 degrees F or colder, it is safe.

How about frozen foods?

If your food still has ice crystals, it is usually safe to refreeze. Discard any items in either freezer or refrigerator that have come into contact with raw meat juices. Thawed food should be cooked and eaten immediately, provided it has not been held at room temperature (above 45 degrees F) for more than two (2) hours. Bacteria grow faster at temperatures above 45 degrees F.

Food with high water content (meats, soups, seafood, etc.) stay frozen longer than food with low water content (baked goods, etc.) Large cuts of meat and poultry will stay frozen longer than baked goods or smaller items.

How long will my frozen foods stay frozen in the freezer?

One (1) to three (3) days for a full freezer, about one (1) day for a half-full freezer, depending on if:

- Freezer door stays closed
- Freezer is full or nearly full – the less crowded the freezer, the shorter the time the food stays frozen
- Outside air temperature is cool or warm
- Freezer is large and well insulated – small freezers do not keep foods frozen as long

If the power is not expected to be restored for a long time, what are my options?

If possible, transfer your food to a freezer that is still powered (e.g. a friend's freezer or a commercial frozen food storage warehouse). Use dry ice if available.

Is dry ice safe to use?

Dry ice is very cold (about minus 215 degrees F) (your freezer is about 0 to 10 degrees F), so always use gloves when handling dry ice.

Use 2 ½ to 3 pounds of dry ice per cubic foot of freezer space (50 pounds will keep an 18 cubic foot freezer safe for at least two (2) days). Place ice on each shelf.

Packing food tightly with dry ice will keep food frozen longer; packing empty spaces with crumpled newspaper or blankets will slow air circulation and make dry ice last longer. You can also wrap dry ice in paper to slow “melting”.

CAUTION: Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide. Allow gas fumes to vent after opening freezer – dry ice turns back into carbon dioxide gas as it “melts”; stand back when opening the freezer door. Do not store dry ice in glass or other sealed, air-tight containers.

If my food has completely thawed but is still cold, is it safe to refreeze once the power is restored?

If your food was held at 45 degrees F or less for not more than two (2) days, you may refreeze the food, provided that:

- Fruits may be refrozen if not spoiled
- Vegetables should not be refrozen if no ice crystals remain
- Meats should be discarded if discolored or foul smelling, or if the meat was held at above 45 degrees F for more than two (2) hours
- Seafood should not be refrozen unless ice crystals remain – seafood is very perishable
- Ice cream and frozen dinners should not be refrozen

Refreezing food may result in some loss of quality. Refrozen food should be used as soon as possible. When cooking refrozen food, keep in mind that they have been thawed once before. If thawing is necessary, do it in the refrigerator, or use the microwave and cook immediately after.

How can I tell if my food is safe?

Perishable food held at temperatures above 45 degrees F for more than two (2) hours should be discarded. If the food has been at room temperature for an unknown amount of time, it should be discarded.

Spoiled food may have off-colors or unusual odors. However, food poisoning and food spoilage are caused by different bacteria. Food that has become tainted by food poisoning bacteria cannot be detected by sight, smell, touch, or taste. You should not taste questionable food.

◆ WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT ◆